

## ISRAEL'S COMMUNISTS AND FELLOW-TRAVELERS

### *Their Role in Strengthening "Neutralism"*

MARK ALEXANDER

A STOCK phrase of official Zionist propaganda until recently was: "There are no Communists in Jewish Palestine." Or, if there were any, they were very few and belonged exclusively to the lunatic fringe that plagues every society.

This may have been true enough fifteen or even ten years ago—as long as the official Communist line was one of a fundamental opposition to Zionism. The extreme Zionist left was then bitterly anti-Communist, and hardly any Jews in Palestine fellow-traveled. But important changes have occurred since the recent world war, and especially since the establishment of the State of Israel. Not only does Israel's official Communist party, known as "Maki," now have several thou-

sand members, with an even greater number of voters; but her third largest party, the United Workers, called "Mapam," has in recent years swung almost all the way over from Zionism to out-and-out Stalinism. And at the same time, fellow-traveling, neutralism, and "progressivism" have become more and more popular, as the country labors under its grave economic crisis.

OF THE three pillars of Stalinism in Israel, the official Communist party, Maki, is the least important politically, and the least interesting. Though no better or worse than most Communist parties, it is small and uninfluential, and in recent years Mapam, for reasons of its own, has tried to create the impression that the Israeli Communists are inferior examples of their species. But this is untrue: Maki has grown since the establishment of the new state; in 1951 it received 4 per cent of the total vote, and right now would have a good chance of getting 5 per cent.

At least half, and most likely more than half, of Maki's members are Arabs, the party—for obvious reasons—being much stronger among them than among the Jews. It has also been successful in getting a foothold among the immigrants in some of the new camps, settlements, and suburbs—especially among those from Bulgaria and Iraq. However, many of these new recruits were already either party members or close to the party in their countries of origin. Some of the left-wing Zionist youth movements have been infiltrated, notably Hashomer Hatzair, groups of whose members have gone over *en bloc* to the Young Communist League, known by its initials as "B.N.K."

The significance of these accessions of

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THE ignorant slander that Israel is somehow "Communitic" has gained no currency in the face of the patent fact that its dominant political viewpoint and economic patterns are the products of a movement that has bitterly opposed Communism from its birth. During the long years of Jewish settlement in Palestine, the Communists were a minuscule and despised sect. But in the few years since the establishment of the State of Israel, there have been disturbing indications that the Communists have become considerably stronger and, more important, have developed a strange and hardly comprehensible influence over a major Israeli party, the Mapam. MARK ALEXANDER, who lives in the Middle East and is a close observer of events there, analyzes the nature of Communist influences in Israel and tries to explain why, despite the violent anti-Zionism and barely-veiled anti-Semitism of the "anti-cosmopolite" campaigns of Eastern Europe, Communists have gained ground. Mr. Alexander's article on "The Near East's Communist-Fascist Front" was published in the May COMMENTARY; he has written frequently for *The Twentieth Century* (London) and other periodicals.



new members and supporters should not, however, be exaggerated. The Communists have had similar successes, though on a much smaller scale, over the last twenty years in Palestine, and have not yet been able to hold more than a small fraction of the new recruits. Most leave after a year or two, join other parties, or lose interest in politics altogether. The rate of turnover in its membership, never published, must have been enormous ever since the Communist party was founded in Palestine in the early 1920's. In this respect, again, Maki is no different from Communist parties elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Israel in 1952 is more fertile ground for Stalinism than it used to be. Until 1947 the Communists opposed the very idea of a Jewish state and Jewish immigration in Palestine; consequently, they could never hope to influence many Jews in Palestine, aside perhaps from those who wanted to leave. But since the official Soviet declaration of sympathy with Jewish Palestine in 1947 and 1948, the party has reconciled itself to the existence of an independent Israel, and although it continues to oppose Zionism on principle, it has successfully evaded most attempts to force it to take an unequivocal position on the issue. Now, for the first time, Maki no longer functions in a vacuum, but with solid ground under its feet, and can come forth as a champion of "patriotism" and Israeli "independence."

The past history of the party still burdens it nonetheless. Thirty years of Communist struggle against Jewish settlement in Palestine, and the Jewish national movement as such, carried on with both propaganda and bombs; fifteen years of cooperation with the ex-Mufti, and then the "peace with Hitler" campaign of 1939-41—to be reminded of all this can be very discomfiting. Yet it should not be forgotten that three out of four adults in Israel were either in some other country in 1938, or only of kindergarten age, and are therefore susceptible to the preposterous claim that the pre-1948 issues of the official Communist newspaper *Kol Ha'am*, brandished in anti-Communist

propaganda, were forged by the British police in collaboration with Jewish anti-Communists. When pressed hard enough, however, the Communist leaders usually admit that grave mistakes were made in the past, but counter by asking whether anyone else can deny having made mistakes, and by asserting that the present leadership of the Communist party in Israel was not responsible for the "deviations" of the past.

**M**AKI is probably one of the rare Communist parties in the world that not only lacks an official history, but does not even print newspaper articles devoted to the study of its past. This is a serious handicap, but then the number of historically-minded people in Israel is certainly no larger than anywhere else, and the number of those willing and able to learn anything from the past is even smaller. What interests the average immigrant from Iraq or Bulgaria is not historical arguments but immediate issues like housing, food, and working conditions. All his grievances are exploited by Maki, and if it were headed by people of real competence, instead of the nonentities who make up its present leadership, it could have made much greater headway.

But a shortage of leadership material is not Maki's only trouble at present. It also faces many objective difficulties. The anti-Jewish — "anti-cosmopolitan" — campaign in the Soviet sphere is one; "Jewish nationalism" is another. Like all Communist parties, Maki has to subordinate local and national interests to the higher interests of the "homeland of socialism." This may be relatively easy in European countries where nationalism has faded as a paramount political force, but it is another thing entirely in a country that has just won her national independence.\* Add to this the fact

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\* The resolution of Maki's Twelfth Party Congress in May 1952 signified, according to most observers, a partial return to the traditional anti-Zionist line. The party recognized the existence of the State of Israel, but not its present frontiers, and demanded that all territory not assigned to Israel by the UN decision of November 29, 1947 should be ceded by her and go to make up a new



that Israel's isolated position in the Middle East negates any sort of anti-militarist propaganda; yet this kind of propaganda happens to be one of the foremost tasks of the Communist parties today. Maki might argue plausibly that Israel is not threatened by Soviet Russia, but it cannot convince the Israelis that the threat of a "second round" is unreal. Should the "anti-imperialist" forces supported by Russia in the Arab countries come to power, the danger to Israel would be even greater, since these movements are all rabidly anti-Jewish. Thus, to advocate pacificism in Israel these days is suicidal for any political party, and Maki must realize it.

Intellectually and ideologically, Maki functions on an even lower level than the average Communist party of our day. Six out of seven contributions to its ideological organ, *Baderech*, are translations. Whether from inability or caution, party members abstain from writing or publishing anything on such tricky subjects as "Stalinism and Jewish History," "Israel and the Jewish People in the Light of Marxism," etc. Nor has a single book on the history or the theoretical or specific problems of Israel and the Jewish people appeared under Maki's auspices. A handful of people who can be classed sociologically as intellectuals are to be found in the party's leadership and on its periphery, but none of them plays an important political role, or has attained prominence in his own field of work.

*Kol Ha'am* ("Voice of the People") has the smallest circulation of the twelve Hebrew dailies in Israel, and the lowest cultural level. But this is no reason to underestimate the influence of the paper and its party; it simply means that Maki does not cater to what is called in Communist jargon the "working intelligentsia," or to the general Hebrew newspaper-reader. Over

independent Arab state. This would include something more than one third of the present territory of Israel. Thus Maki has again been put on the defensive, politically speaking, in Israel, and is now denounced by all the other Israeli parties for its championing of Arab national interests.

the last few years, by a kind of division of labor between Maki and Mapam, the former has become by and large a party, not of the proletariat, but of the culturally backward sections of Israeli society in general, while Mapam is the one that talks Stalinism to the working class as such.

THERE are scores of parties like Maki in the world, but only one Mapam. Mapam might be likened to Nenni's Socialists in Italy, but this would be misleading because Nenni has no line of his own, nor are there *kibbutzim* or a Zionist movement in Italy. Ideologically, Mapam has surrendered unconditionally to Maki and the Cominform. It may take a few years more for the inevitable consequences of this surrender to become clear, but it is no longer a question of principle, and the time period depends mainly on international developments. Political differences are still debated inside Mapam, but a minority, a quarter or perhaps even a third of its membership, are bound to split away sooner or later, and then all internal controversy will cease. Though the present debates may have a certain topical interest, they are not very relevant to the party's future.

Up to the Second World War, Mapam was a Marxist, radical, left-wing party. Hashomer Hatzair, Ahdut Avoda, and Left Poale Zion, which united to make up Mapam, were all in sharp opposition to the Comintern on the Zionist issue; most of them also condemned the Moscow Trials, the pact with Hitler, and the Finnish war; they criticized the internal development of the Soviet Union and the policies of the Communist parties in general, and attacked them for their utter subservience to Moscow. These left Zionist parties established contacts with the Independent Labor Party in England, with left socialists in France and elsewhere, but not with the Comintern. Since then, however, there has been a radical change in the attitude of all but a very few of the Hashomer Hatzair leaders; and a sizable minority of the other two groups have gone along with them.



This change is due to a multiplicity of factors that are hard to define in relation to each other. The importance of the Soviet Union's change to a favorable attitude toward the Jews of Palestine in 1947 and 1948 should not be minimized, but, as previously noted, the effect of this on Israeli opinion has been at least partly canceled by the "anti-cosmopolite" and anti-Jewish drives behind the Iron Curtain, and the USSR's continued opposition to Zionism as a movement. And those features of Stalinist policy that the Mapam leaders criticized so bitterly ten and twelve years ago, the anti-equalitarian tendencies inside the Soviet social structure, the imperialist trend of Soviet foreign policy, the subservience of the non-Russian Communist parties to Moscow—all these have become even more marked. Nonetheless, Mapam has in recent years been drawn as by an irresistible magnet closer to the orbit of Stalinism.

ANY serious attempt to explain this puzzling situation must go back to the past. People tend to hold on to the political attitudes they form in late adolescence, and the leaders of Mapam, and especially Hashomer Hatzair, are no exceptions. Twenty-five years ago most of them were high-school students at the Jewish Gymnasias of Poland, Lithuania, and Bessarabia; Zionism and—even more fundamentally—orthodox Marxism were the main intellectual influences to which they were exposed. Then came training as Zionist pioneers, then emigration to Palestine at the age of eighteen or twenty, then the kibbutz, and finally careers as *askanim*, or community leaders. Surrounded ever since reaching maturity by urgent immediate problems, they have lacked the time, the calm, and even the inner impulse to sit down and re-examine their basic attitudes and assumptions. Marx, Engels, and Lenin have continued to serve as their highest authorities on philosophy, politics, and history. More recent Western political thought has not reached them, since many of them do not know English or French. Originally, their main contact with

the West was through the German socialist press and literature, but that well dried up twenty years ago. Some of them know Russian and used to follow developments in the Soviet Union, but the direct illumination received from this source during the last twenty-five years was hardly calculated to throw new light on the teachings of the "classical masters of socialism." All in all, the attitude of the average Mapam leader to the Soviet Union has not changed at bottom, since he left school in Warsaw, Lodz, or Vilna, and it remains the sensational and romantic one of the 1920's, when the great Russian Revolution was still in its "heroic" period, engaged in the building of a new society, and proclaiming internationalism, equality, and cultural freedom to the world.

Clinging as they did to the Marxism and Leninism they had imbibed in the 1920's, many of the leaders of Mapam began to feel after the war that their previous anti-Stalinism had been a symptom of the "infantile malady" of radicalism. What counted for them now—after the impact of fascism, followed by the Russian victory—was that the means of production in Russia and the "popular democracies" had been "socialized," and, as Marxists, they felt this to be the decisive criterion. There were some other leaders in Mapam who had reservations and privately criticized the USSR for its imperialism and totalitarianism, doubting whether the abuses of its system were of transient nature; but they too were, and are, Marxists; and they believe in the inevitability of the victory of Communism—even if it is Stalin's brand. And so they now hope to make the best of a bad situation by climbing on the bandwagon.

The majority of the older generation of the Hashomer Hatzair and Mapam leadership belong to this latter group. But this generation came from the larger cities of Eastern Europe, where Hashomer Hatzair had its main centers during the early 1920's, and their outlook is still cosmopolitan by comparison with that of the next, or second, generation in Mapam's leadership—those



between twenty-five and forty—and of the members of the Mapam youth movements, who constitute the third generation.

Hailing mostly from small towns and villages of East Europe, the second-generation leaders of Mapam are relatively provincial in education and experience; Soviet or Soviet-influenced culture has been the only guiding influence in their lives, and Western ways still remain largely a mystery to them. Very few of this generation had had acquaintance with any democratic way of life before arriving in Palestine, and they still remain more impressed by Soviet-type totalitarian planning than by Israel's parliamentary regime. This makes them highly susceptible to Stalinist "logic."

It should be kept in mind, however, that my characterizations apply *only to a minority* of Mapam's membership, the *askanim*, the doers, the leaders, and the activists of the political groups in the kibbutzim. The average kibbutz member's interest in politics is, by contrast, quite limited, and the party militants have to work hard to spur him to action. But the average member also has practically no hand in the shaping of Mapam's policy, which is, after all, what we are interested in here.

**B**UT why should Mapam's "orthodox" Marxism bind it so closely to Stalinism? Stalin himself could reinterpret—nay, falsify—Marxism to make it consistent with his own departures from it. Why cannot Mapam interpret Marxism for itself and take an independent, or Titoist, course? Certain Mapamniks—notably in Ahdut Avoda—have indeed argued in this way, but they remain a minority. Besides, Stalinism owes its great prestige in Mapam, not to its ideas, but to Russia's military victories and to the successes of Communism since the war. Nor has Mapam the stomach any longer to struggle for high but abstract ideals in the wilderness, calumniated all the while by Stalinists as traitors to the socialist cause. It has chosen, rather, to be a small spoke in a big and powerful wheel.

Thus the party has moved over to the

Stalinist camp for opportunist even more than for ideological reasons. This opportunism does not aim at immediate political or material advantages; it could be better described as a refined way of surrendering one's ideals or principles. The Mapam leaders, being far from naive, know that most if not all of them would be purged, together with the present leaders of Maki, were a "people's democracy" to be installed in Israel, and if they continue to advance the cause of Stalinism it is because they are victims of a profound fatalism. Hegel said that whatever was real was also rational. Stalinism is real, and the Mapamniks believe that it will become even more real in the future. And it is better to be on the side of the real, and therefore rational, and lose one's head, than to be against it and lose one's head anyway. . . .

Mapam has now begun to cooperate closely with Maki, its old and despised rival. In the past it would not deign to notice Maki; now it apologizes publicly whenever Maki charges it with behavior unbecoming to a prospective member of the Cominform. Mapam has also begun to limit its collaboration with the other Zionist parties to a minimum, and the extremists are already suggesting that the party now secede from the World Zionist Organization altogether. There is, however, small chance that it will do anything of the sort in the near future. For a severance of relations with the Zionists and all-out opposition to the government's economic policy would hurt the material interests of the kibbutzim, which have become more than ever the main basis of Mapam's strength now that it no longer has a position of its own and so many of its members in the cities are faltering in their allegiance.

**R**ELATIONS between Mapam and the Communists became somewhat strained—though most likely only temporarily—after the Maki conference in May. The Mapam daily paper published a series of articles criticizing—rather apologetically—the new Communist program and charged Maki



with misinterpreting Communism in the light of Israeli necessities, because it rejected the idea of a "territorial concentration" of the Jewish people. This *terminus technicus* has been used by Mapam more and more frequently instead of "Zionism," which sounds too disreputable in Communist ears. The official Communists replied by urging Mapam to give up its running fight with Maki and follow its lead. "But what place will be granted us in the Israel outlined by Maki?" asked a Mapam writer in *Al Ha'mishmar*. "The very same place that has been granted, after a year or two, to all collaborators with the Communists in Eastern Europe," answered a Mapai paper. (It should be noted, however, that one of the Hashomer Hatzair leaders, Meir Yaari, now in Mapam's right wing, smuggled a few quasi-Zionist statements into a speech he made at the "world peace conference" in Berlin this past July. He was not well received.)

But except on issues that concern Israel directly, Mapam has swallowed the Cominform outlook hook, line, and sinker. It even supports the semi-fascist "anti-imperialist" movements in Egypt like the Moslem Brotherhood and Ahmed Hussein and his henchmen, and it also supports the Soviet plan for an independent reunited Germany with an army of its own. The leaders of the Ahdut Avoda faction have from time to time raised halfhearted objections, but their group has no influence in the party, and in any case sooner or later its members will leave Mapam or be expelled.

Mapam has retained a measure of independence on such specific Israeli and Jewish issues as the demand that Jews be allowed to emigrate from Soviet Russia and its satellites, and the refusal to accept the internationalization of Jerusalem. Yet even these positions are on the way to being abandoned.

The late Andrei Zhdanov has been installed as Mapam's highest arbiter in things cultural. Thus Freud is now being replaced by the great Pavlov, which means changing Hashomer Hatzair's whole educational system. A rearguard skirmish is being

fought by those who still see some sound ideas in psychoanalysis, but there is no doubt about the final outcome. Freud, together with most of Marx, and with Herzl and Borochoy, will be jettisoned on the last lap of Mapam's journey towards Moscow.

**T**HOUGH most Mapam leaders are head and shoulders above those of Maki in character and intellect, they now make a practice of humbling themselves before the latter and asking forgiveness for past sins. This is only a foretaste of things to come. In the end, the Mapam kibbutzim will have to be liquidated or changed over into collective farms on the kolkhoz model—simply because Mapam cannot afford to be more progressive than the Russian collective farms and thus violate the principle of Soviet priority in all things.\*

Hashomer Hatzair now plays the only decisive role inside Mapam. The left Poale Zion group will probably split away in a few months—perhaps to join the Lamdan-Lifshitz group, which seceded several months ago in an effort, unsuccessful so far, to found a new Israeli workers' party. The future of Ahdut Avoda, which has wavered for many years between "centrist" Luxemburgism and Leninism, is even more uncertain. For years now it has been steadily losing ground to the majority in Mapam simply because it has had no line whatsoever with which to counter Hashomer Hatzair's very clear and positive policy of identification with Stalinism. Yet as much as Ahdut Avoda is opposed to the rest of

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\* Mapam now plans, at a conference to be held in August, to adopt the organizational method of the Communist parties—"democratic centralism," which means the elimination of internal factions and free discussion. Ahdut Avoda is opposed to this, while the pro-Zionist wing of Hashomer Hatzair (Hazan, Yaari, Bentov) appears ready to compromise. The anti-Zionist wing of Hashomer Hatzair (Sneh, Y. Riftin, Rubin, as well as Mishmeret Zeira, the Mapam youth movement) would like to oust the Zionist elements from Mapam altogether in order to create the conditions for its merger with the Communist party. It appears most likely, however, that such final decisions will be deferred for the time being.



Mapam on ideological grounds, it is even more opposed on personal grounds to Mapai, of which it once was part.

Mention should also be made of two non-ideological bodies in Mapam that overlap at times but not always: the "cynics" and the "disillusioned." The cynics, a small but influential group, are led by a comparatively recent recruit from right-wing Zionism who in the last few years has made himself the most authoritative leader of Communism in Israel. Those whom Moshe Sneh speaks for are the hundred-per-cent Stalinists who never falter in their belief because they simply don't believe. Some of them never were Marxists or socialists; others lost their convictions some time ago and now put all their money on Stalin only because they think he will win out in the Middle East and they hope to make a political fortune by it—though the fate of Rudolf Slansky and of their own comrade, Mordechai Oren, in Czechoslovakia, has lately dampened their zeal a little.

The disillusioned include a number of prominent members of Mapam who are by now deeply disappointed in their own party as well as in Communism and the Soviet Union. They admit privately that they ought to be fighting against Stalinism instead of for it; but their families and most of their friends live in the kibbutz, and once they chose to oppose Stalinism openly they would have to leave the kibbutz and start life over again elsewhere. This is a decision few are willing to make, especially when they have families. And so these people live like Marranos, and look for peace of mind in things like coin-collecting, archaeology, and scientific poultry-breeding.

THE third pillar of Stalinism in Israel is formed by the neutralists, the cultural "progressivists," and all the various breeds of fellow-travelers in general. These groups have been little noticed abroad, but are taken for granted in Israel as perfectly natural phenomena. Their influence on public opinion is great—far out of proportion to the relatively small number of writers, artists,

scientists, public and semi-public figures who actually do fellow-travel.

The Soviet Union's stand on Palestine in the United Nations in 1947 and 1948 won her a good deal of favor among Palestinian Jews. And because of Israel's delicate position internationally, the government felt afterwards that an "objective" attitude in domestic politics was imperative, assuming that "objective" was synonymous with neutrality between East and West. Thereby a No Man's Land was created in public opinion that lasted until 1950, and into which Stalinism was able to make successful inroads. To this day Stalinism holds on to many of the gains then made—and it would have made more had not the slogans launched by Maki and Mapam over the last year been somewhat too extreme for the public's taste.

The least important of the fellow-traveling organizations in Israel are those sponsored by Maki. The few members of the Democratic Women's Association, for example, are pretty well aware that they belong to a Communist front, and nobody is fooled. One Maki-sponsored outfit, Tarbut L'am ("Culture for the People"), specializes in soliciting money from Jews who used to belong to or sympathize with Communist parties in Eastern Europe and have since gone to France, Argentina, or Canada and become affluent. Their contributions are supposed to ease them of pangs of conscience caused by the memory of their radical past. Their money goes to support the Hebrew Communist daily *Kol Ha'am* and a number of periodicals in other languages, as well as to subsidize a housing project for the leaders of Maki. If Tarbut L'am sponsors any genuinely cultural activities, they are shrouded in deepest secrecy.

The front organizations in which Mapam and Maki cooperate are much more influential. These include an Israeli "peace" committee, with special sections for doctors, lawyers, etc., and Israeli-Soviet, Israeli-Czech, Israeli-Polish—and so on—friendship societies. Though the latter are comparatively inactive, the "peace" committee has



staged many meetings, demonstrations, and congresses: against bacteriological warfare, against prominent "warmongers" visiting Israel, against — and for — German rearmament, and so on, depending on what happens to be Stalin's order of the day.

The Stockholm Peace Appeal received, allegedly, four hundred thousand signatures in Israel. This would be the largest proportion in any country this side of the Iron Curtain, but we can safely subtract a third of these signatures, which, according to reliable information, were appended at second- and third-hand, and in other fraudulent ways. Nevertheless, the success of the Peace Appeal in Israel is undeniable, and faces us with the unpleasant fact that, in addition to those who voted Mapam or Maki at the last elections, at least a tenth of the adult population of Israel — and probably more — fell for the Communist "peace" line. The lack of initiative in the matter shown by Mapai and the other anti-Communist parties is at least partly to blame.

**A**MONG Mapam-sponsored fellow-traveling organizations, as distinct from Maki's, are the Center for Progressive Culture, the Workers Library, some bodies of lesser importance, and a number of literary periodicals published under the auspices of Mapam itself. The Center for Progressive Culture arranges weekly talks on such topics as the virtues of Soviet "socialist realism" in the arts, the superiority of Pavlov's psychology over psychoanalysis, and so forth. The Center also celebrates the anniversaries of both the older and newer saints in the Stalinist calendar — Gogol, Balzac, Leonardo da Vinci, Victor Hugo — with prominence given to whatever appropriate quotations can be found in Lenin or Stalin. The Workers Library is probably the largest single publishing house in the country. In the past it "deviated" by publishing writers like Silone, Hemingway, Freud, and Otto Bauer (to name a few), but now it conforms faithfully to the Zhdanov line and publishes only safe authors like Howard Fast and Louis Aragon, and Soviet writers. The younger

Israeli writers associated with the Center for Progressive Culture view "socialist realism" with a certain reserve, to say the least, but are rather reluctant to break with the Center because it is one of the few publishing houses that give young writers a chance.

Israeli fellow-travelers are all enthusiastic about Soviet culture — except for those manifestations of it that happen to touch on their own field of endeavor; in every other area they are quite willing to accept Stalin's guidance. The poet laureate of Mapam thinks highly of Soviet music, but would rather not discuss Soviet verse; and privately, the painters of Mapam hold Russian art to be beneath contempt. The leading pro-Communist psychoanalyst of Israel voiced his low opinion of Soviet psychology in the "bourgeois" press, but this did not prevent him from being as active in the "peace" movement and the society for Soviet-Israeli friendship as any other "progressive" scientist, artist, writer, or philosopher.

While the West sends Israel machines, food, and money, the East sends her books, magazines, and newspapers. The unavailability to the general public of books and serious periodicals from America, England, and France over the last two years has served to cut the Israelis off from any of the new ideas that circulate in the West — and as a matter of fact from any real knowledge and understanding of the political character and social conditions of Western countries, especially the United States. Russian books and magazines, on the other hand, are sold at ridiculously low prices. There has, in fact, been a great rise of interest in Soviet publications in general, so that Russian-language teachers are in great demand now. Since 1950, American culture has been represented in Israel mainly by comic books, some of the mass-circulation magazines, and bad movies — grist for the mills of the "progressives," who assert that this is all the culture the United States has to offer Israel.

**I**SRAELI neutralism is not very different in essence from neutralism elsewhere, say



in France. But it is perhaps a little less sophisticated, and with a certain angle of its own. Stalin's favor, or at least tolerance, continues to be sought after, and so one tends to refrain from criticism of the USSR or of Communism in general—in accordance with a tradition that began in 1947. To criticize Communist activities outside Israel, it is argued, may cause countries like Rumania to stop emigration to Israel altogether; the only way to help the Jews behind the Iron Curtain is to be reserved and discreet. As Jews and Israelis, it is felt, there is too much to lose otherwise.

Neutralism as such is found chiefly in the center and on the right, while the non-totalitarian left is remarkably free from it. To be sure, the left may doubt the wisdom of Western policy in the Middle East and fear that too close an Israeli identification with the West might lead to appeasement of the Arabs, but the right and center are not swayed by such tactical considerations when they plump for neutralism pure and simple. They argue that, since Soviet hostility is directed almost exclusively against the United States, the Middle East would not be a main front in a future war and could perhaps be kept out of the war altogether. Therefore Israel ought to do everything possible to stay aloof; she should strengthen her army against a possible Arab aggressor, but not voluntarily grant military bases to the West or enter into a Middle Eastern defense scheme. The fallaciousness of this line of reasoning does not have to be pointed out here. Yet a sizable sector of public opinion in Israel backs this line.

The responsible political parties in Israel have done little, as I have said, to counteract pro-Soviet and neutralist tendencies. Mapam's and Maki's subservience to Soviet interests ought to make them an easy target for a nationalist party, but Herut is only a caricature of that. The General Zionists are too busy fighting Mapai to take cognizance of how much more Stalinism is to be feared than democratic socialism. The Mapai leaders have as a rule taken a broader view, but they are so deep in the day-to-day

business of administration that they cannot give much attention to issues that are not, to them, of immediate importance.

Mapai makes another error: it fails, alarmingly, to appreciate the importance of public relations, and for that reason, among others, the government gets the worst possible press in Israel. The Israelis have done remarkable things in the last four years, and news of this could be made the most effective antidote to Stalinist propaganda, but these achievements have been reserved strictly for export and never brought home to the inhabitants of the country itself. The government-controlled radio is perhaps the only effective means the Ben Gurion administration has of influencing public opinion, yet, for fear of seeming biased, it tries to avoid controversial issues, and thus Communism either at home or abroad is rarely criticized in its broadcasts.

This is one example. A second concerns one David Courtney, a British journalist who won much friendship in Israel for his outspoken criticism of British Mandate policy before 1948. Since then, however, he has become a totalitarian liberal—say, the equivalent of Alvarez del Vayo (a comparison Mr. Courtney himself certainly won't resent). But del Vayo is one of a hundred and more magazine commentators on foreign affairs in the United States; David Courtney is the columnist on foreign politics for the *only* English-language daily in Israel.

**I**T WOULD not do to try to predict the future of Maki, Mapam, Stalinism, and fellow-traveling in Israel too specifically at this moment. Israel is a small country, and what happens will depend largely on developments elsewhere. Still, this does not mean that much, much more could not be done, some of it by the United States, and certainly much, much more by American Jewry, which has a large stake in this development, to strengthen the courage and convictions of that great majority of Israelis who do not want to wake up one day to find that they have become citizens of a "people's democracy."